

From the Bookshelf

The Quiet Canadian's War By Charles W. E. Morris

Room 3603, by H. Montgomery Hyde. New York: Farrar, Straus & Co. 257 pp. \$4.50.

World War II was fought on many wide-slung battle fronts, but one of the strangest campaigns was waged from an unobtrusive headquarters in Rockefeller Center, New York. Here in mid-1940, under the somewhat prosaic name of British Security Coordination, was established the nucleus of an intelligence organization that was to play an outstanding role in the war against the Axis.

The avowed purpose of the organization was to collect information on enemy activities aimed against the continuance of Britain's war effort and to plan appropriate countermeasures. From hitherto secret files, Mr. Hyde—who held a key position in the BSC organization—has woven a book of fascinating interest.

To head up this unique organization British intelligence chose a Canadian business man, William Stephenson. A much-decorated fighter pilot of World War I, Mr. Stephenson had become a millionaire by the time he was thirty. Obviously an organizing genius, he set about recruiting a group of experts in many fields.

A working liaison with J. Edgar Hoover, head of the Federal Bureau of Investigation, was established, though it would appear that at first Mr. Hoover entertained certain reservations about BSC. Mr. Stephenson found his great ally and kindred spirit in the person of General Donovan, who was later to head the OSS. To their associates Big Bill Donovan and Little Bill Stephenson were a remarkable combination.

Mr. Stephenson, it appears, was able to channel a wealth of vital information to General Donovan and in the formative stages of OSS to provide a great deal of the training program to equip agents for secret missions in many parts of the world. Through General Donovan, President Roosevelt was furnished with much of the secret data gathered by British intelligence sources. How completely the American President trusted Mr. Stephenson is indicated by the fact that on Nov. 27, 1941, he sent his son James with a special message which enabled Mr. Stephenson to send to London a secret tele-

gram: "Japanese negotiations off. Services expect action within two weeks."

Prior to Pearl Harbor BSC agents apprehended two Japanese spies with incriminating documents about American naval bases in their possession. BSC also gave the FBI the tip resulting in the arrest of a Japanese spy in 1944, through an interception by the Bermuda censors.

Another of the notable triumphs of BSC was the disclosure that the Vichy government embassy in the United States was a clique of agents aiding the Nazis. One of BSC's most successful operatives was a woman of remarkable ability and daring, who succeeded in obtaining the texts of nearly all the telegrams received or dispatched from the Vichy embassy, and who also secured the keys to both the French and Italian naval ciphers. Possession of the Italian naval cipher enabled the British to anticipate Italian fleet movements and resulted in the resounding victory at Cape Matapan.

For some months prior to American entry into the war, Mr. Stephenson through trusted intermediaries had been supplying the powerful short wave station WRUL in Boston with covert British propaganda which was broadcast in some 22 languages. After Pearl Harbor it became a key factor in General Donovan's political warfare activities. Also by judiciously leaking information to two leading syndicated columnists Stephenson was enabled to reach millions of Americans who regularly read their columns or listened to their broadcasts.

Though lacking the cloak-and-dagger approach, "Room 3603" is as engrossing as a whodunit. Inferentially the more venturesome aspects of some of the missions are briefly touched on.

Perhaps William Stephenson's contribution to the war effort was admirably summed up in a letter from the Hon. David Bruce, United States Ambassador to Great Britain, who wrote: "His American friend, the late General William J. Donovan, did not exaggerate when he said that British Security Coordination was built from nothing into the greatest secret intelligence and operations organization that has ever existed anywhere." It was indeed a fitting tribute to the "quiet Canadian."